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Plunkett, Horace Curzon, Sir

The problem of congestion in Ireland

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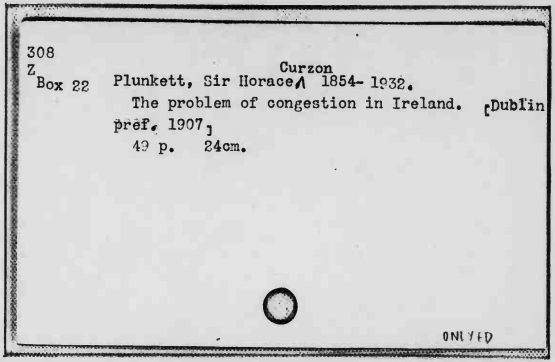

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THE PROBLEM OF CONGESTION IN IRELAND.

BY

SIR HORACE PLUNKETT,

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION FOR IRELAND.

THE PROBLEM OF CONGESTION IN IRELAND.

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May 21 1906 BB

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND
TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION FOR IRELAND,
DUBLIN, *28th March, 1907.*

To the Members of the Council of Agriculture, the Agricultural Board, and the Board of Technical Instruction.

MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,

I invite your attention to the following Memorandum which was submitted to the Royal Commission on Congestion. It was written as a general statement of policy for dealing with the problems with which the Commission has to deal, and in its support the Assistant Secretaries to the Department have given evidence upon the practical details.

I feel that it is due to you, who have special functions and responsibilities in connection with the Department, that you should be apprised of the views which we have been led to lay before the Commission. And this for a threefold reason:—Firstly, because the policy of the Department can be fruitful only with your approval and co-operation; secondly, because any measures of economic reform which the Commission may suggest can hardly fail to affect the character and range of that part of the work which is done by the County Councils and County Committees; and thirdly, because the Commission, in framing its recommendations, will surely have regard to the attitude of public opinion towards the problems under consideration. As regards the last reason, it is plain that, in this matter, public opinion will be largely influenced by those to whom this letter is addressed.

The Memorandum having been written at the request of the Royal Commission, necessarily assumes a knowledge of many matters which could not have been included in it without duplicating evidence tendered by other witnesses, and repeating details contained in the appendices to the volumes already published. It relates primarily to the congested districts; but you are concerned, some directly, and all indirectly, with the issues of which it treats. The Congested Districts Board have since the end of 1903 (before which time the Department's operations were by law excluded from the congested area) withdrawn their schemes of agricultural improvement. They took this course because experience showed the administrative advantages which would accrue from extending our County Schemes uniformly over the entire area of the partly congested Counties, and also in order to concentrate their energies and their resources upon the pressing work of purchasing and re-settling estates.

So important was this function that they did not feel justified in contributing more than £2,000 a year towards the cost of extending our schemes into the congested districts. The Department, with, of course, the concurrence of the Agricultural Board, have supplemented the Congested Districts Board's contribution by considerable sums taken from moneys originally given by Parliament for the non-congested area.

If, as I have argued in the Memorandum, schemes for the development of agriculture and subsidiary industries, and for home improvement, can be best administered in the congested area by employing the representative machinery of the Department, it must be borne in mind that the cost of these schemes will be larger in poor and backward districts than in those more happily circumstanced. And this is true of many districts not scheduled as congested. Indeed, I should say there is hardly a county in Ireland which has not some districts needing special attention. Thus that part of the Department's finance which the Boards control is involved in the measures which may be taken for the relief of congestion.

And not only do the Boards control the funds known as the Department's Endowment in their application to general or national purposes, but, as regards local purposes, the funds are further controlled by local administrative bodies who add to them from the rates. Then again, the Council of Agriculture reviews the policy and procedure of the Department, the Boards and the local authorities which act jointly with the central bodies. Hence it is that you are concerned with the proposals which I have submitted to the Royal Commission for the special treatment of backward rural districts.

In the Memorandum I explain the general scope and purpose of the Department's proposals. Professor Campbell and Mr. Fletcher, the chief officers for agriculture and technical instruction respectively, have elaborated them in detail, and have furnished a rough estimate of their cost. Their evidence, together with a Memorandum upon Industries in their relation to Rural Economy (as submitted, on behalf of the Department, by Mr. Fletcher), will appear in a volume of evidence subsequent to that to which my Memorandum is appended.

I have indicated the special considerations which the Department's officers had before them in presenting the case which is summarised in the Memorandum; but there are other and larger issues involved which intimately affect our work and aims. Within the range of the problems I have discussed, decisions have now to be taken upon which the chances of our people prospering at home will largely depend. A social and economic revolution has been precipitated by the passage of the 1903 Land Act. The land, the chief asset of the nation, is being handed over, mostly in very small and difficult holdings, to a large number of independent owners. Upon the success of these in working the land depends, not only the future well-being of our agricultural classes, but also the ability of large numbers of them to remain in Ireland. It is obvious that the measure of their success will largely depend upon the economic policy which it may be possible for the Government to adopt, and upon the administrative efficiency of the different branches of Government concerned in carrying out that policy. It is equally true that both the policy and its execution must have the support of a well-informed public opinion if the new peasant proprietary are to be given the assistance which we believe to be essential for their success.

In writing the Memorandum I had constantly before my mind one consideration to which I must call your special attention. Many influential people, taking what I have called the agrarian view, are prepared to carry out a rapid re-distribution of the land, with the laudable desire of giving as many families as possible a sufficiency of acres, but with too little regard to the other factors which go to make holdings economic. It is the urgent importance of developing our schemes of agricultural development, so as to prepare the way for whatever re-settlement of the land may be decided upon, which has impelled me to ask you to devote the best thought of which you are capable to the policy which the Department has worked out, and for which it hopes to gain your approval.

Now, whether the views I have expressed, or wholly different views, are ultimately to prevail, I hold that it is absolutely essential to the future well-being of our country that the Government, having to deal with this momentous question of the re-settlement of the land, should be aided by a public opinion guided and led by those who are in a position, not only to get a thorough grasp of the elements of the problem, but also to give practical assistance in working it out. I have always held that the economic progress of the country must depend upon the growth of economic thought, and I should be acting inconsistently with my whole official life if I did not, at this crisis, place clearly before you the Department's attitude towards a matter of national importance, in regard to which you have by statute official duties, and, as Irishmen, the deepest concern.

I am, my Lords and Gentlemen,

Yours faithfully,

HORACE PLUNKETT.

MEMORANDUM

SUBMITTED TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON CONGESTION,

BY

SIR HORACE PLUNKETT,

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION FOR IRELAND.

I.—Introductory.

The term Congestion.

1. On the threshold of an inquiry into congestion it is necessary to explain what is meant by a term more appropriate to much of the thought upon the problem than to the actual conditions to which it relates. In the course of my examination as the person chiefly responsible for the policy and administration of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, I gave as the working definition of rural congestion we have agreed upon, *a condition of poverty due to deficiency of land or other means of earning what is necessary to the maintenance of a decent standard of living.* I was told that this is substantially the same working definition as the Royal Commission have adopted; so we continue our discussion of a difficult matter with the not inconsiderable advantage that we shall be talking about the same thing.

The Problem of Congestion. The Two Aspects.

2. There are two main aspects of the congested districts problem. There is the material side of the question—the land side, and there is the human side. There is the land, and there is the man. The two aspects of the question, the mental and the physical, are, of course, involved the one in the other. But my interest has been more in the study of the man and his relation to the land and I wish, therefore, to deal first and chiefly with this aspect of the problem. I recognise, of course, that insufficiency of land is the chief cause of the evil of congestion, and that more or better

land is the patent remedy. But where this cause has been operating upon communities for a lengthened period its mere removal will not bring prosperity. The moral effects of the land system must also be recognised, and largely counteracted, before the application of the chief remedy can be effectively or even safely applied. To make my meaning clear, I will add to my working definition a rough survey of the human conditions which are generally associated with congestion, and must be fully taken into account in any sound remedial policy.

The People of the Congested Districts.

3. Taken as a whole, that portion of the population which has now to be assisted is in a deplorably backward state. But such terms as 'congestion' and 'agricultural slums' give a wholly wrong impression of the social economy of the poorer Irish peasantry, and suggest difficulties which happily have not to be dealt with in this case. We have none of the degradation which too frequently characterises urban poverty. Squalor and conditions the reverse of sanitary are no doubt to be found; but they are more than counterbalanced by moral qualities of a high order, a physical condition marvellously preserved in view of the circumstances in which it has been maintained, and a quickness of intellect not commonly associated with an agricultural existence, which give promise of an early response to treatment by an understanding government.

4. Notwithstanding these advantages, it cannot be said that our western peasantry have reached a stage where the mere provision of opportunities will suffice. Through a long and sad history almost every influence which has operated upon the minds of these people has militated against the application of the only principles which have been found to be effective in elevating rural communities similarly depressed in other countries. Capable under certain influences of surprising industry, they lack the qualities which secure the fruits of industry, because neither education nor economic circumstances have developed an industrial habit. Clever in their resourcefulness, shrewd in their bargainings, they surely are. Yet both in their agricultural economy and commercial dealings they display a total lack of the most elementary principles of either technical

or business knowledge. They look to the Government to put things right, but entertain a suspicion of all governmental interference, which is not without historic justification. A sufficiency of fairly good land will do much to improve their condition, and at an earlier stage it might have prevented the existence to-day of a congested districts problem. But the mere provision of land, if not supplemented by the measures which are required to enable the people to thrive upon it, can at best be a temporary remedy, and might reproduce the evil.

5. The task of enabling these old-world folk to settle permanently in West of Ireland homes is no light one. As a not unnatural consequence of all that we know of their history, they have had no opportunity of even forming in their minds such an idea of a home as would give heart and hope to a peasantry in the pursuit of a decent and progressive standard of living. In spite of a passionate devotion to their country, and with a fervent desire to remain in it, they have, in the poorer districts at any rate, little hope or expectation of resisting the call of America, whenever they can afford to emigrate. Once the home is broken up the Atlantic is easier to cross than the parish boundary. These adverse factors cannot be ignored either in an analysis of the conditions to be dealt with or in the discussion of remedial measures.

The Agrarian View.

6. The impression somewhat widely prevails that the Royal Commission was appointed for the sole purpose of making a case for compulsory purchase, and the suggestion well illustrates the attitude of public opinion towards the problem of congestion. It emphasises the importance of what I conceive to be the real value of the present inquiry. The little progress so far made towards the solution of the problem may be in part attributable to the way it was approached in 1891. The very announcement of a remedial policy tended to satisfy the public conscience that all that was possible was being done. But this is just one of those cases where a wide popular understanding of the main factors of the problem is an essential element in the solution. Without a public opinion which has developed a

considerable degree of economic thought, an accurate diagnosis, and still less a successful treatment of the evil could not be expected.

7. The influences which have moulded public opinion in this matter are well known. The land question has bulked so largely in the public mind that the other factors in the problems of agricultural Ireland have been little considered. A redistribution of the land has been regarded not merely as a first essential of a cure for congestion, but as a panacea; and this view has done much to thwart the efforts of those who have sought to build up a sound social economy in our rural life. The policy of the State, following rather than leading public opinion, has until quite recently, tended to stereotype in the public mind what I may call for convenience sake the agrarian view.

Reasons for a New Departure.

8. This view of the conditions, and of the treatment indicated, appears to me to account for the fact that while the congested districts have shared in the economic development of the entire country, the relative backwardness of the congested area remains but little changed. Only in a small way can you alter the physical conditions, but there is endless scope for human development. If little progress has been made towards a solution of the problem of congestion, it is, perhaps, because it has never been treated—as the Royal Commission are now called upon by their reference to consider it—*as a whole*. To substantiate this opinion I will trace briefly the origin and progress of the congested districts policy since 1891, when the treatment of congestion first became a matter of Governmental concern, and then sketch the evolution of another policy of social and economic development which is being worked out in Ireland. This will enable me to submit for the consideration of the Commission the principles and main lines of action which my own experience leads me to think would be best calculated to accelerate social and economic progress in the congested area.

II.—The Congested Districts Policy.

9. The creation of the Congested Districts Board was due to the awakening of a public conscience to the fact that, whatever

might be said about Irish grievances, there was a state of chronic destitution in the West of Ireland which could hardly be exaggerated. Such a condition of affairs was felt to be a disgrace to civilisation and to call for prompt and liberal action by the State. There was, however, this initial difficulty to overcome. While the evil was patent the remedy was not easy. Owing to the concentration of public opinion upon the political and the agrarian questions, there was no real knowledge of the conditions, and consequently a barrenness of suggestion for their treatment.

10. When I began to study this part of the problem of Irish poverty, I happened to come across the late James Hacke Tuke, whose fifty years of devoted service to the poor in the West of Ireland has had little more recognition than he would have asked for it. I opened the conversation by asking him to consider the possibilities of agricultural co-operation in the districts which he knew so well. The Land Act of 1891 had just passed, and I recall his explanation of the congested districts clauses, on the preparation of which I gathered he had been consulted by the Government. He was of opinion that in the absence of representative local institutions or of voluntary organisation for economic and social purposes in rural Ireland (of which he appreciated the importance, but rather, I thought, exaggerated the difficulties), there was no other course possible for treating the congested districts than that which was actually adopted—the appointment of a body of philanthropic and well-informed volunteer workers with ample funds and a free hand.

11. At the time I quite agreed with Mr. Tuke; but with the wisdom which comes after the event, I am inclined to think that, even in the circumstances of 1891, it would have made for progress if a strong Royal Commission had been appointed, had inquired into and reported upon the conditions, and had laid down a policy. Apart from the guidance which it would have given to the Board, it would have had a special value in forming and developing a sound public opinion on this complex and difficult question; and that, then as now, I can hardly insist too strongly, is a matter of most practical importance.

12. But this is a dead issue now. For a decade and a half the Board has discharged its functions with the single object of doing

the utmost amount of good to the inhabitants of the congested area with the resources at its command. Upon the value to the country of the work accomplished by the Board it is not, of course, for one of its members to speak. I do not fear any impartial judgment on the way in which it has fulfilled its mission as it conceived it, or rather as it was conceived for it.

13. In its earlier years the Board's activities were necessarily absorbed in a multiplicity of urgently needed direct aids to impoverished districts, which, besides being good in themselves, gave the people a new sense that they were not altogether neglected in their poverty and distress. Furthermore, it furnished to those who might in future be charged with the improvement of the condition of the people in the congested area an interesting series of practical experiments. The Board's system of administration has been throughout highly centralised, the chief exception being the delegation of a portion of its work to the Parish Committees. This was a step in the right direction and did good. But the constitution and function of these bodies were framed in such a way as to make them essentially temporary, and at best but a partial demonstration of the kind of voluntary organisation which, in my view, is urgently needed as a means towards social and economic advancement.

The Limitations of the Board's Policy.

14. All this work which, as I have said, admirably fulfilled the task with which the Board was charged, is open to one line of constructive criticism. The people who were reached by the Board's beneficence unquestionably had their material condition improved in a great number of cases. But what of their mental outlook? Taking the people as a whole, what has been done to stimulate their self-reliance rather than reliance upon external aid? If the Board's financial assistance were to be withdrawn, what, as the result of the Board's intervention for the last fifteen years, would be the effect upon the economic character of the communities they have had under their charge? Are the people more independent, and are they better organised for mutual assistance, and so in a better position to be helped by the Government and to help themselves? These are the tests the average thinker on social and economic problems will apply,

rather than the things which can be seen in goodly array in a well-organised tour, or read of in the Board's Annual Reports. My criticism of the policy comes to this. It has not really got down to the fundamental things, and what is more serious, I consider that both from its constitution and its organisation, the Board can attack the problem only in a very partial way.

15. The conditions to which I am directing attention are just now being well illustrated by the present situation in the districts affected by last year's potato blight, and still more by the attitude of local opinion towards it. Naturally the Government comes in for the whole blame, and when the Commissioners visit the scene of the calamity, they will hear a good deal about the callous inaction of the Department, which, having taken over the agricultural work of the Congested Districts Board, would be responsible if any negligence could be proved, and is quite prepared to defend itself at the proper time.

16. But here I would draw attention to some salient facts of the situation. The instruction given by the Congested Districts Board for a long, and by the Department for a short, period—to say nothing of similar work done at different times by the Royal Dublin Society and the Local Government Board—have brought it about that the people are thoroughly well informed both as to the chief causes of potato blight and the means of preventing it. The explanation of the failure to prevent the visitation last year was that the year before, owing to favourable climatic conditions, there was little blight; and those who had not taken the known precautions suffered but slightly for their neglect. Last year large numbers of those who sprayed the year before took chances, with the natural result.

17. In many districts spraying was resorted to, but frequently only by the crude and extravagant methods which have to be employed where no spraying machine is available. The machines are too costly for individual ownership in very poor districts, but when a few peasants combine together for joint ownership, they quickly get back the price of the machine in the saving of the spraying material, and pay for it several times over in the saving of the crop. But this simple system of combination has largely broken down, because while it is everybody's

interest to keep the machine in order by making necessary, but extremely simple, repairs, and replacing damaged parts at a nominal expenditure, it is nobody's business to do so, and the machines are frequently allowed to remain unfit for use.

18. The full significance of this instance, which might be multiplied indefinitely, cannot be appreciated except by those who have an intimate personal knowledge of the moral as well as the physical difficulties of the problem. The blight on the potatoes is not the real difficulty with which we have to deal. What we now need is a policy which has as its constant aim not only the inculcation of the principles of self-help and self-reliance, but the making of these principles vital and operative through a broadly-conceived scheme for improving the conditions of the people in rural Ireland. With a policy to guide public opinion and a scheme for workers, of whom both clerical and lay there are a large number anxious to help, rapid progress can be made.

III.—Another Policy of Social and Economic Development.

Three Fundamental Principles.

19. It is in regard to the administration of State aid in such a way as to stimulate self-reliance—to evoke and supplement rather than provide a substitute for voluntary effort—that the policy and procedure of the Congested Districts Board and those of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction differ. At the same time the aims and objects of these two bodies are absolutely identical, and it is to be regretted that so many people restrict their interest in the problem of congestion to the making of invidious comparisons between them. When these comparisons are not merely personal, but profess to judge the two systems of administration on their merits, they ought not to have any weight whatever unless they take full account of the periods during which the Board and the Department have respectively been at work in the congested area, the resources at their command, their statutory powers, and the support or opposition which has been accorded to them in their efforts. In the evidence so far tendered upon this issue these considerations appear to be ignored.

20. To the inception of the Board I have adverted already. The inception of the Department was due to a non-political, and therefore little known, movement which began shortly before the Board was created. It attracted a good deal of public notice in connection with the formation of the Recess Committee in 1895, and still more when the Committee issued its Report, which appeared in the autumn of 1896. That Report, based upon a wide inquiry into the means by which the condition of rural communities abroad had been socially and economically improved, brought home to thinking Irishmen a wholly new conception of the principles underlying State aid to agriculture and industry. The plain teaching of the facts collected was that wherever rural communities, formerly depressed, were now progressive, the change was invariably due to the operation of three chief agencies—*education*, *representation*, and *organisation*.

21. To this threefold principle of the Recess Committee Mr. Gerald Balfour, after he had created the new Local Government machinery in 1898, sought to give full legislative effect in the Act creating the Department in 1899. Education, practical and specialised, as distinct from general, was included in the statutory functions of the Department; representation is, to a degree unprecedented in these islands, embodied in its constitution, and is the distinguishing feature of its administration; and organisation is coming to be recognised as a vitally essential feature of the Department's administrative policy. I propose now to show how the intentions of Parliament are being carried out in the three main directions, and to give my reasons for believing that the system of the Department is applicable to all the work which has to be done in the congested area, other than the purchase and resale of land.

(1) Education.

22. Upon the educational functions of the Department I need speak here only in the most general terms, as the details are to be thoroughly explained by Professor Campbell and Mr. Fletcher, its two chief officers for agriculture and technical instruction, respectively. It is enough here to say that the Department is gradually developing in the country a complete system

of technical instruction for agriculture, for the subsidiary industries, and for manufactures of an urban character. The modification of this system for backward rural districts has been thoroughly worked out, and only awaits the necessary sanction and certain additional funds, which will be specified in detail, for its extension into the congested area. I am, of course, aware that the success of technical education must depend largely upon the general education of the country. The evidence to be tendered will suggest the working relations which should be established between the Department and the Board of National Education.

(2) Representation.

23. The question of representation raises a very large and important issue. In giving effect to this principle, the Department has acted upon the belief that what the Government can do to improve the condition of even the poorest communities is of immeasurably less value than what they can do to help themselves. It is well known that the opposite view generally prevails in backward rural districts; and this is especially the case in Ireland, where the people still cherish resentment over the action of the Government in the past, to which they not unnaturally attribute all that is wrong in their present condition. It is just this feeling which makes the problem of congestion so extremely difficult to solve, especially for those who hold, as I do, that the people themselves must, in one way or another, be mainly instrumental in its solution. But in spite of its difficulties—I might almost say because of its difficulties—I adhere to the fulfilment of three cardinal conditions as essential to a true solution of the problem. The people to be helped must be induced to take a practical interest in working out their own economic salvation; public opinion must recognise the essential necessity of this limitation upon external aid; and the administrative machinery, through which the Government is to do its part, must be framed and worked with the constant aim of evoking local effort and informing public opinion.

24. The practical question, therefore, to be decided—and none can be of more vital public importance—is whether the self-government machinery of the County and Rural District Councils

is to be used as far as possible to deal with the problem. Is the work to be done through a nominated or an elective system, or through a combination of the two? A good deal of confusion arises from the assumption that a nominative system cannot be a representative system, although, curiously, it is frequently argued that the Congested Districts Board, which is wholly nominated, is representative, and that the Department, which in that part of its administration with which we are here chiefly concerned is controlled by bodies mainly elected, is not representative. The Department has had practical demonstration of the value of a nominated element in bodies predominantly elective. It is true that, in the carrying out of much practical work, it is often easier to ensure efficiency by central administration. But where, looking beyond material things, a strengthening of the economic and social character of the people is a fundamental aim, the association of the people in a more or less responsible capacity with the work is highly desirable. My experience in the Department for the last six years has convinced me that a constitution and a procedure based to some extent on representative principles would have enabled the Congested Districts Board to have made far more progress in that part of the work of regeneration to which I am here giving chief prominence. The only difficulty in the way is the undeveloped state of the public opinion with which we have to work. But the operation of representative machinery in dealing with the conditions is itself by far the best means yet devised of developing a sound public opinion, and so breaking the vicious circle.

25. The cardinal difference between the constitutions of the Board and the Department, as regards their representative character, is due simply to the fact that they are the creation of different periods of time. The one came before, the other after, the Local Government Act. I do not hold a brief for the present administration of the Department of Agriculture—that case is being tried in another court. But I wish to say that the fundamental principles on which the Department is based are of greater importance than the goodness or badness of the present administration. The principle of representation is a vital one under modern social and economic as well as under modern

political development; and I believe the Commission should make it a principle on which to base its proposals for a sound scheme for dealing with congestion in Ireland.

(3) Organisation.

26. The third of the new agencies in the Recess Committee's scheme of social and economic development is the one with which I anticipate the Royal Commission will have the greatest difficulty. The action of the Department in the matter has given rise to much heated controversy, with the inevitable result that the whole question is confused by false issues. Agricultural organisation in Ireland takes the form of co-operation, upon which the trader and the farmer, to put it mildly, do not see eye to eye. The political influence of the traders in rural Ireland could hardly be exaggerated, and their opposition to the Department's support of the agricultural co-operation movement is very strenuous. The opposition will gradually disappear, because it can be demonstrated that there is no real conflict of interest between the farmer and the trader; indeed, it has greatly moderated since the days when a well-known journal described co-operation in Ireland as the invention of the devil, the present writer filling the title *rôle* in the tragedy.

27. I must first explain what is meant by the term organisation, as it is here used. Representation, as being worked out in conjunction with local administrative bodies, of course implies organisation; but I use the latter term in the voluntary as distinct from the official sense. It applies to combinations for purely business purposes, the Government's action in the matter being limited to teaching people or getting them taught how to combine themselves into co-operative associations for the more profitable conduct of every branch of farming. At the same time the Department takes no part in or responsibility for the business transactions of any societies which they may be instrumental in creating.

The Council of Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operation.

28. It is not necessary to develop here the case for agricultural co-operation, but I think it highly relevant to explain exactly where this part of the Department's policy stands at

the moment, and how the action we have taken has been sanctioned by the instrument of public opinion, to which, by our representative constitution, we are bound to listen—the Council of Agriculture.

29. At the spring meeting of the Council of Agriculture last year the principle of agricultural co-operation was not only affirmed, but the Department was instructed to see that the farmers were organised into the proper associations to give practical effect to the co-operative theory. The question as to whether farmers should be taught the principles and working details of agricultural co-operation by the Department (either through its officials or through officials appointed by the County Councils under the Departmental system of delegating its local administration), or whether the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society should be employed to do the work under such control as the Department, which was to supply a large portion of the funds out of public moneys, should determine to exercise, was postponed to the autumn meeting. In the meantime I was instructed to issue to the members of the Council a Memorandum, placing the issue before them from the Department's point of view.*

30. The Department's policy in this matter is dictated by two main considerations. Firstly, agricultural co-operation is now generally admitted to be essential to the success of farming, especially small farming, as a business; secondly, it is found that both the central department and the local representative bodies are seriously handicapped in comparison with similar institutions elsewhere by the fact of the farmers not being

* This memorandum, and also the address with which I opened the debate at the Autumn meeting of the Council (*vide* Department's *Journal* for January, 1907), will explain fully the reasons which induced the Council to decide in favour of employing the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society to do the work of organisation. It is interesting to note that the chief argument against the course adopted was that it seemed to reflect upon the administrative capacity of the representative bodies through which the Department does its local work. But the great majority of the members saw that there was an immense advantage in handing over the work to a voluntary association which had been engaged, for a dozen years, in that work and no other. Moreover, in the earlier stages, at any rate, each county could not employ, even if they could find, an organiser.

organised on the lines which have been adopted in every progressive foreign country. Therefore, organisation becomes essentially necessary—to the farmer for business reasons, to the Department for administrative reasons.

31. After a full day's debate at the autumn meeting, the following amendment to a resolution in the opposite sense was carried by a majority of over two to one of those who voted :—

> "This meeting of the Council, having regard to the unanimous resolution of the Council Meeting of 16th May, expressing the opinion that it is desirable that the Department should promote agricultural organisation and provide the funds necessary for the purpose, recommends that the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, which is the only existing body having a special knowledge of this work, should be aided in carrying out an approved scheme of agricultural organisation, subject to effective supervision of all expenditure in connection therewith by the Department; and that, with a view to stimulating contributions from societies and subscribers, and thus securing greater economy, as well as evoking a greater measure of local effort, the subsidy granted by the Department should be in the form of a *pro rata* contribution."

It has been suggested that this result was due to the nominated element; but this was not the case, as if not a single nominated member had voted, there would still have been a majority in favour of the amendment.

Small Holdings Committee and Agricultural Co-operation.

32. Since this meeting took place the report of the Departmental Committee, appointed by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, upon small holdings in Great Britain (Cd. 3277), has been issued. From its summary of recommendations I may quote the following :—

> "That practical steps be taken by Government to promote all forms of agricultural co-operation, and especially to encourage the formation of Agricultural Credit Societies by means of State loans, on approved security of a Central Co-operative Agricultural Credit Association.

> "That an annual grant be made to the Agricultural Organisation Society by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, under such limitations as the Board may think desirable."

Five out of the eleven members of the committee append reservations or supplementary reports. Not one takes exception to the recommendations as regards agricultural co-operation. Three give special emphasis to them. I never have been more certain of anything in the course of my work upon the problems of rural life in Ireland than that the issue submitted to the Council of Agriculture at their last meeting was decided on its merits.

Special need for Agricultural Co operation in poor districts in relation to land, labour, and capital.

33. I will say no more on the general question of agricultural co-operation as a factor in agricultural development, but I think it well to dwell for a moment upon those aspects of this kind of organisation which have a special bearing upon the economy of depressed rural districts. Agricultural co-operation is now recognised to be advantageous to all kinds of farming, but the lower you go down the economic scale the more important a resource it becomes, and, curiously, the more amenable are agriculturists to co-operative organisation. When you face the problem of setting up a peasant proprietary on small holdings, unless you postulate a thorough organisation on sound co-operative lines, you are simply setting up an institution which will never be self-supporting. I have long held that while the peasant proprietor is, under modern conditions of agricultural production and distribution, generally uneconomic, a peasant proprietary properly constituted may yet be the best device for extracting the maximum amount of wealth from the land. To make the paradox true it is essential to introduce that form of voluntary association which is the counterpart of the combinations resorted to in every industrial and commercial undertaking of an urban character. This I hold to be an essential condition of a properly-constituted peasant proprietary. No opponent of

agricultural co-operation has suggested any alternative means by which the disadvantages under which the small producer labours as compared with the large farmer can be lessened.

34. I have never believed in co-operative ownership of land, but co-operation may be a very helpful resource in the utilisation of the land in the congested area. The Irish Agricultural Organisation Society have initiated a few experiments in co-operative grazing which have yielded hopeful results. The system applies to land which is either too bad or too good to be profitably broken up, and enables the small cultivator to operate at a distance from his holding, with the minimum expenditure of time and money in the management of the scheme. To go further into the matter here would lead me into too much detail, but I have mentioned it, because it is one of the means by which we might, in some cases, obviate the necessity for migration, which is always not only a difficult, but also a costly operation.

35. A fully developed system of agricultural co-operation would also prove to be an invaluable resource in surmounting the labour difficulty of poor communities. One of the inherent difficulties of the small holding is that the family in possession must someti es be deficient in labour power. No form of organisation can be devised which will countervail the circumstance of all the children of any generation happening to be girls ; but a well thought out and comprehensive scheme of agricultural co-operation can go a long way towards meeting the difficulty. The weak family will often be able to devolve upon the strong association most of its business and some of its agricultural operations, to the mutual advantage both of the family and of the association.

36. The need for co-operation is even more pressing when we come to consider the question of capital. The peasant proprietary now in course of creation will start with a serious deficiency in both fixed and working capital. If this deficiency is not supplied, the new agrarian order will break down. I do not mean that the State will lose the money advanced, but only that the obligation will not be discharged by those whom the whole policy was designed to settle permanently upon the land. They will sell out and go, a result which should be safeguarded

against, at least until the new peasant proprietary have had a fair start. The fixed capital required is in respect of buildings, especially outhouses, which are, as Professor Campbell will explain, a first essential. Capital for this requirement might, I think, be advanced by the State on loan, and, in the case of small holders, repaid by an addition to their purchase annuities. But besides this fixed capital the majority of small holders will require additional capital for live stock, implements, machinery, etc. Whether the working capital for these purposes is derived, by means of short loans from public funds, or from private sources, means must be taken to strengthen the position of farmers as borrowers. We should strive to develop in Ireland a system of agricultural credit, based upon mutual security equal to the best which is to be found in the progressive peasant communities abroad. If this is not done there will be grave danger of the new proprietors mortgaging the interest in their holdings, a practice to be prevented if possible.

37. Upon this matter some interesting evidence has been given by one of the most gifted sociologists who have ever personally studied and done practical work upon the problems of Irish congestion, Mr. George Russell, the Assistant Secretary of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, and more will be given by the Secretary, Mr. Anderson. A great deal might be added to what Mr. Russell has said upon the present relations between the trader and customer in the poorest districts. I have myself collected a mass of information upon this subject which is of necessity confidential, and cannot, therefore, be published. I may say, however, that it has confirmed my belief that it is well within the possibilities of a broadly-conceived and comprehensive scheme of agricultural organisation to effect a gradual change in these relations, which will not only get rid of barter and long credit, but lessen the temptation to drink, with enormous benefit to the body of customers, and without any loss to the trader.

Educational Value of the Three Cardinal Principles.

38. I hope I have now made clear to the Commission the fundamental ideas underlying the Department's policy. I believe that our three guiding principles are being imported into the social economy of rural Ireland in a way which must in the near

future produce a profound effect upon the life of the people. We give the first place to education, and we try to work our other two main principles so as to be as educational as possible. Politically the rapid decentralisation of our schemes is educational in the best sense of the word, and organisation is in reality the business education of adults. It is true that an ideal system of general education would, and I hope some day will, do away with the necessity for Governmental intervention in the matter. It has done so in many European countries where the people certainly have not a higher degree of intelligence than the Irish. Organisation cannot be taught to those who have not entered upon the business of their lives, and therefore is not a school subject. In the present backward state of the country, Governmental promotion of this means of commercially educating adults is, I think, wholly justified.

The Administrative Question. Single and Dual Administration.

39. In the course of my examination, I dwelt upon the necessity of substituting single for dual administration of analogous Governmental functions in the congested districts. I was then speaking from experience of the working of the Board and the Department, and founded my argument upon administrative convenience, simplicity, and economy. I had also in my mind the far more important consideration of economic, political, and social principle which I have now had an opportunity of explaining. Were no really important question of principle involved, I should hesitate to suggest the discontinuance of a body whose members have displayed towards each other a spirit of conciliation which is too valuable an asset in Irish public life to be lightly sacrificed. I am the best witness to this spirit, as my views have increasingly diverged from those held by the majority of my colleagues.

40. The argument in favour of leaving the congested districts under the charge of the Board, and confining the operations of the Department to the rest of the country, seems to be based on, firstly, the greater popularity enjoyed by the older institution, and secondly, its long experience and the intimate knowledge of the congested districts possessed by some of its

members. It is further urged that the economic level of very poor rural communities must be raised before they are fit subjects for the Department's system.

41. Now, I have already stated in my official evidence that the experience and local knowledge of the Board ought to be utilised*; nor do I see any reason why whatever sum may be added to the Department's endowment fund in respect of work in the congested districts should not be regarded as specially ear-marked for that purpose, and this sum administered by the Department and the Agricultural Board with the aid of a special Committee for these districts. I believe that if the members of the Congested Districts Board fell in with this suggestion and gave their active support to the new regime, they would be exercising an immensely more helpful influence upon the people whose condition they desire to improve.

42. The popularity of the Board has been attributed to its independence of Governmental control. This view will hardly commend itself to any serious thinker upon the duties and functions of government in the matter. Obviously there must be some central control where central, as distinct from local, funds are employed. To argue otherwise would not strengthen the case before Parliament for additional funds which will be required if a larger policy is to be adopted. Nor, I submit, can popularity, in the most widely accepted sense of the term, be taken as a test of the soundness of measures, either legislative or administrative, which aim at the social and economic development of backward and depressed communities. The history of the world's greatest social reformers tells all the other way. Personally, I think it good for reform that reformers generally have to struggle against the stream. The Department's policy has, I am convinced, been made more constructive by the untiring vigilance of its critics, and I doubt whether immunity from criticism has been altogether to the advantage of the Congested Districts Board.

43. The real question is, however, whether in the poorer districts, where the people are unquestionably on an economic level which intensifies the difficulty of remedial treatment, the system

* See Questions 18315-18323 of evidence.

advocated by the Department can be successfully applied. I firmly believe that it can, that the system is elastic, and that it is what is required for the congested districts as for the rest of the country. If, as I hold, the differences in the economic level are differences of degree and not of kind, the distinction between congested and non-congested districts and communities should be regarded as a temporary expedient for which the necessity has passed ; and the wisdom of continuing two central institutions, operating side by side in the same or adjoining areas, dealing with analogous conditions upon different principles of administration, can hardly be sustained.

IV. The Re-settlement of the Land.

The acquisition of land for enlargement of holdings and migration.

44. Following the order of treatment which presents itself to my mind as the best way of approaching the problem, I have reserved to the last the factor of the land, which I know generally holds the first place and overshadows all other aspects of what should be treated as "the problem of congestion as a whole." This part of the subject can be considered under two distinct heads :—the acquisition of additional land for the purposes of migration and enlargement of holdings, and the subsequent utilisation of whatever land it may be decided to acquire, compulsorily or otherwise. This is not the branch of the subject to which I have devoted chief thought and attention, and consequently my opinions will not weigh against those of many other witnesses who have special knowledge of land tenure, or who are charged with administering the Land Acts. I must, however, give my views, for what they are worth, upon the principles which should govern such resettlement of the people upon the land as may be feasible, because every other factor in the problem I am treating must be considered in its relation to this difficult operation.

45. I was one of those who assented to the somewhat obvious proposition (embodied in a resolution of the Congested Districts Board, of which much has been heard, and from which much is expected) that if the Board could not otherwise obtain the land

it required for such enlargement of existing and creation of new holdings as was necessary for the relief of congestion, it must be enabled to acquire it compulsorily at a fair price. The resolution was at the time premature, because the resources of voluntary purchase with State assistance had not been sufficiently tried. Whether the time has now come for compulsory legislation, the Commission will have the best opportunity of deciding. Should the evidence show compulsory powers to have become necessary, two important questions will arise :—to whom these powers are to be entrusted, and within what limitations they shall be exercised.

46. Upon the first of these issues I should not have ventured to express an opinion, had it not been that one of the Commissioners at the conclusion of my examination intimated that he particularly wished to know what I thought about it.* From the administrative point of view, the arguments I have advanced in favour of single as against dual administration in rural Ireland in matters of social and economic development are in principle applicable to the purchase and re-sale of land. If the prices given by two bodies operating in adjoining or in the same areas were based upon a uniform system of valuation, I see no reason for, and many against, two sets of valuers. If the system of valuation is different, the case would be still worse. I also see grave objections to having two bodies in Ireland acting independently, one buying land which the other might more urgently require or more profitably use. But, as in the other sphere of administration, the *personnel* of the Congested Districts Board should be utilised in an advisory capacity. In the resettlement of the land there should be the fullest co-operation between the land-purchasing authority and those who are in charge of the economic functions not directly concerned with land tenure. This will not be facilitated by having two administrative bodies, rather than one, in either or both spheres of administration.

47. Upon the limitations within which compulsion should be exercised I have some strong convictions. I have not before me information which would justify me in offering any confident opinion as to what lands should be included in such a schedule

*See Questions 18504 and 18507.

as that which the Crofter Commission were given powers to make. The lands about which the least difficulty will be felt are the untenanted lands, exclusive of demesnes, chiefly in the Province of Connaught, and which on account of their situation are immediately available for the relief of congestion. Where the line should be drawn must be decided by Parliament when it has the advantage of such an exhaustive inquiry as the Commission will have made. But I strongly hold that it should be drawn somewhere. In a country where land hunger is a potent economic influence, whenever compulsory purchase is under discussion, there will be a demand for its unrestricted application. Tenanted and untenanted land alike, right up to the gates of the Phœnix Park, will be considered to be available.

48. It is in view of the probability that untenanted land will prove insufficient for the needs of the Government, and of the consequent agitation which may arise for the "scaling down" of large holdings, that I think it essentially important that an early decision should be come to in this matter. The Department believes—and Professor Campbell's evidence sets out fully the reasons upon which the belief is based—that a revolution in our whole system of agriculture has become urgently necessary. In this revolution the large farmers will have to take a leading part, involving the investment of a good deal of capital and a greatly increased employment of labour. I shall return to this subject But here I desire to state my strong opinion that, in the interest of the small struggling farmer and the agricultural labourer, the large farmer should be given every inducement to extend his farming operations. This he will not do if the fear of expropriation hangs over him *

49. It may be argued, and I for one should not resist the argument, that the Act of 1903 should have dealt upon different principles with the poorer and the better off parts of the country; and certainly State advances of £7,000 to a single tenant to enable him to acquire his holding look strange in view of the land situation with which the Royal Commission is confronted

* I would direct the special attention of all who respond to my appeal for the earnest study of this difficult question, to the claim I submit on behalf of the large farmers. With the landlords gone, we shall sorely need them. But they must do their part, as we all must do ours.

in the West. But we must not forget how predominantly agriculture furnishes the basis of the country's material wealth, and how vitally important it is to build up our staple industry. In agriculture, as in commerce and manufacture, confidence is essential to progress. Neither capital nor enterprise will be attracted to agricultural pursuits, if, to use a pregnant phrase of the German economist, Dr. Moritz Bonn, the impression is created that "in land legislation, finality means next Government."

50. If the views which the Department submits are accepted by the Commission, the necessity for a statement of policy in the exercise of compulsory powers will become apparent. I therefore provisionally submit, for the consideration of the Commissioners, the general principle which appears to me to reconcile public interests and private rights, and at the same time to accord with the real end in view. Looking at the matter in its relations to the practical problem before us, I feel that compulsory powers should only be employed in favour of settlers who can be relied upon to use the land for the economic strengthening of the country. There should be at least a strong probability that the land will be made more productive in virtue of the industry and intelligence which are going to be devoted to its cultivation.

The redistribution of the land. Its difficulties.

51. There remains to be considered the conditions which affect the redistribution of the unallocated lands which are already in the hands of the Congested Districts Board and the Estates Commissioners, and may yet be acquired by them. I know that the treatment of this part of the problem which commends itself to my judgment will be regarded by some as theoretical and unpractical. But a long and somewhat full experience of work upon analogous problems has convinced me of the absolute necessity of making a good deal of abstract reasoning the foundation of practical work in which you want to enlist the sympathy and help of intelligent but not well-educated communities. It may, too, be held that the Royal Commission should not waste its time on philosophical treatises, but should, after hearing what practical men have got to say,

make a few straightforward businesslike, simple recommendations that everybody can understand, and the Government can adopt. I shall, however, assume that the Royal Commission will endeavour both to establish principles which will stand the analysis of economists and sociologists, and also to indicate the compromise between what is ideally best and what is politically possible.

52. Foreign analogies might be cited which would strongly support the position I have taken up. But I need not go outside these islands for both thought and practical work upon cognate problems. No one can read carefully the recently issued report of the Small Holdings Committee without being impressed with the extreme difficulty of placing small holdings on a sound and permanent basis under existing economic conditions. The Committee does not appear to hesitate to ask for any legislation which may be necessary to deal with the land. There is in Great Britain no land hunger and no agrarian agitation to be reckoned with. The Committee are able, therefore, to take a broad and philosophic view of the situation, and the chief value of their report is that they treat the land factor in its relation to all the other factors of the problem of rural life.

53. It is significant that in Great Britain, while the Small Holdings Acts are almost as inoperative as the Compulsory Education Act in Ireland, the Allotment Acts have been altogether successful. In the few cases where small holdings have succeeded the success was generally due to the enthusiasm of those who initiated and organised them. In most instances the landlords were the prime movers. This is particularly the case in the Scottish crofter districts. The chief condition insisted upon in the report, and abundantly supported by the evidence, is the fitness of the holder to work the holding profitably. Where this is not assured a probationary period is suggested. The promotion of agricultural co-operation by the State, as I have already said, is laid down as an essential element of a sound economy for rural communities with small holdings. Agricultural education is to be further assisted by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries; and in rural and semi-rural schools subjects based on rural needs are to be made compulsory, and

school gardens are to be provided. The Committee hold that until all these things are done the distribution of land should be regarded as being in the experimental stage.

54. The conditions in Ireland are, of course, wholly dissimilar to those which prevail in the rural districts of Great Britain; but, unfortunately, the differences, so far as they affect the problem we are considering, are not favourable to the poorer country. All over Europe an economic revolution has taken place in agricultural production and distribution, and our people have been neither technically nor commercially prepared to meet the altered conditions and compete in the modern market. There have not yet been developed in them the qualities which are essential to agricultural success. It would be folly to ignore so significant a fact as the aversion of the Irish in America from agricultural pursuits. There, at any rate, no readjustment of the land laws was needed to establish our people on the best farming lands of the world had they been so inclined. The rural exodus and urban concentration, perhaps the most marked features of western civilisation, are sociological quite as much as economic tendencies; and it happens that the great majority of the Irish people have just the character and temperament to put them in the van of the movement towards the town. In this respect they were only a little in advance of the times in the life they chose in the United States. Social and intellectual organisations in Ireland will have to join forces with governmental agencies if our people are to be kept upon the land.

55. In addition to these general considerations there are special difficulties which must be first recognised and then dealt with in any scheme of re-settlement. By a Parliamentary compact it is agreed that the evicted tenants must be placed upon farms; but years spent in exile from the land do not increase whatever qualifications they may formerly have possessed for successful husbandry. They will have to be specially looked after, and they are not the most difficult people to provide for. There are certain areas—South-West Connemara probably being the most difficult to deal with—where the landholders are in a state of chronic destitution, and where they are, by every

circumstance of their past history and present condition, utterly unfitted to succeed upon economic holdings. They can and must be made self-supporting on the land, but this cannot be accomplished by giving them farms and calling them farmers.

Advantages of a Variety of Holdings. A Classification.

56. I have thought it necessary to give this rough survey of the conditions which affect the re-settlement of the land, but I do not suggest that the difficulties inherent in the situation are an excuse for deferring redistribution. We cannot put off the provision of farms until we have educated and organised the people to use them to the best advantage; but what I contend is that in carrying out the work we must allow for the defective conditions, and that the parcelling of the land into what may be supposed to be economic holdings may, unless very great care be taken, create, in the long run, a much less prosperous peasantry than a more carefully thought out policy would have ensured.

57. But whether the process of re-settlement be rapid or protracted, some working principles must be agreed to. I will, therefore, submit my own views as to the way in which the holdings of the future should be constituted. For the sake of clearness I am going to use a terminology suggested by the well-known distinction between holdings and allotments adopted in recent legislation. In Ireland we have already provided for us the term *economic holding*. This I retain and take it to mean a farm upon which, given a fair degree of efficiency, a family will be able to support a decent standard of comfort. Any holding upon which the occupant can do more than this I shall call a '*hyper-economic holding*' (throwing the responsibility for this nomenclature upon those who ran into Greek before me); and for pieces of agricultural land which will not provide subsistence for a family without external resources I shall use the term *allotment*.

58. I shall not attempt to fix the proportion which these three divisions of land should in the new agrarian order bear to each other. This is a matter which neither the Royal Commission nor Parliament can now determine. Whatever policy may now be in contemplation for dealing with the chief agent of production

in Ireland, it is safe to predict that the economic law will ultimately dispose of all that the Royal Commission may propose. The strong family of one generation may be the weak family of the next, and no ingenuity can preserve an equality in land-holding while fitness for conducting the industry of farming varies. The strong family will get more land, and the "long, weak" family will have to do with less land, make what laws you will.

(1.) The Economic Holding.

59. I am not, I repeat, arguing against action. Even if no higher ground be taken than the financial considerations involved, the Government is under the necessity of devising a policy for raising the economic level of the poorer rural districts. If such a policy is to gain the wholehearted support of the Irish people, it must have as its aim and justification the settlement of as many people upon the land as can be reasonably expected to maintain themselves upon it in decency and comfort. Towards such an end the division of the entire agricultural area into a sort of chess-board of economic holdings appears to be the most popular means. I have heard people talk as if the carrying out of such a scheme required no greater intellectual effort than the simple arithmetical process of dividing the available acres by the number of deserving applicants.

60. The difficulties, however, of the chess-board solution do not relate only to the pieces, but also to the board itself. Nobody knows yet, or can know, what an economic holding is. It is a purely relative term, dependent upon the standard of comfort which is to prevail, the efficiency of the holder, and his economic environment. In any real solution of the main problem each of these factors will be materially affected. The standard of comfort is rising rapidly, and anyone who keeps in touch with the movement of popular thought in Ireland knows that the causes of the rise will operate increasingly in years to come. And as it rises, the economic holding must expand to meet the larger requirements of the holder.

61. On the other hand, when certain contemplated developments have been carried out, the economic holding may not have to be quite so large as it would have to be to-day. It is quite possible, indeed it is necessary, to revolutionise the

technical and commercial methods of Irish agriculture. The foundations for such a development are being laboriously laid in the country by means which Professor Campbell will explain in detail. The introduction of a more intensive cultivation, the reorganisation of the entire business of farming upon co-operative lines, the encouragement of home industries, and a more thrifty domestic economy will, taken together, enable the Irish peasant to support the agreed standard of comfort on a lesser amount of land than he now requires. The Irish peasant of to-day requires much more land, in proportion to his standard of living, than does, for example, a French, Belgian, Dutch, or North Italian peasant. If the methods which have enabled these peasants to improve their condition are, *mutatis mutandis*, introduced and persistently practised in Ireland, it may be that the Irish peasant will before long prosper upon a holding from which he would now have to emigrate. Where, in the determination of the economic holding, the balance between larger needs requiring more land, and greater efficiency and economy, enabling the family to support itself with less land, will ultimately be struck, cannot now be confidently stated.

62. The earlier experience of the Congested Districts Board in migration and enlargement of holdings was more valuable in its negative than in its positive results. This was incidental to the conditions with which they had to deal. I remember when the conditions of the time forced the Board to take, as the test of an economic holding, the valuation below which experience showed that in time of exceptional distress the families came upon the rates, the minimum valuation being fixed at £6. But then we were dealing with emergency conditions, and had very limited opportunities of acquiring suitable land for our purpose. We could not discuss a standard of comfort when we were face to face with the question of existence.

63. The later operations of the Board are of more positive value; but I gather from the evidence of Mr. Doran, who speaks from the fullest knowledge, that the Board is very far from being in a position to *standardise* the economic holding. Even where contentment reigns upon the Board's newly settled estates, careful account must be taken of the fact that, under the Board's system, the wisdom of which I am not calling in question, the migrants and purchasing tenants have been paid

considerable sums in wages for making improvements on their holdings. Furthermore, the payment of large sums as wages to the tenant purchasers on the Board's estates for engineering works creates conditions of temporary prosperity. Persons who are in a position to influence public opinion have, to my knowledge, been completely misled owing to ignorance of these facts, and have created an impression that the operations of the Board have produced a general improvement of conditions far beyond anything which the Board itself would claim for them. One of the adverse factors to be reckoned with is the reaction which may set in when this assistance, necessarily temporary, is withdrawn.

64. The question of a standard of comfort, in its relation to the re-settlement of the land, is by no means merely academic. I agree with the object at which the advocates of the chess-board solution are aiming—the settlement of as many families as possible on the land. The larger the proportion of truly economic holdings in the re-settlement the better for the nation. But if the re-settlement is to be permanent, it must be a natural social evolution, and this cannot take place until a standard of comfort is, not only an abstraction, as glibly talked about as the economic holding, but a concrete reality in the life of the people. One very good test of the realisation of this ideal would be the passing of that well-known danger to peasant proprietaries, sub-division. We want to create n Ireland a situation analogous to that existing in France, where although the laws of inheritance actually encourage sub-division, sub-division stops when the holdings are reduced to the minimum size consistent with the maintenance of the established standard of comfort. The law may prevent sub-division, but it cannot deal with the far more important factor, the desire to sub-divide. This can be treated effectively in one way, and one way only—by the establishment through education of what is one of the very elements of civilisation, a standard of comfort which people cannot sacrifice without loss of self-respect. This is one of the chief objects of the Department's teaching of domestic economy.*

* In this connection I may be permitted to refer to what I have written elsewhere upon the Irishman's conception of a home, and its influence upon the fortunes of the race abroad. See *Ireland in the New Century* (Third Edition), pp. 51-56.

(2.) Hyper-economic Holdings for Ex-Landlords and Strong Farmers.

65. It will be recognised that the whole question is one of great difficulty, but I hope my object will not be misunderstood. So far from wishing to delay the re-settlement of the land, I am anxious to get the peasantry settled as thickly and as rapidly as is consistent with their well-being. I believe this end will be best attained by a variety of holdings, or (to use the above-mentioned terminology) by supplementing the economic holdings with hyper-economic holdings and with allotments. This view is based upon a wide range of considerations, but I shall restrict myself to points suggested by the social and economic revolution which is now in process in Ireland.

66. It is quite conceivable that the Land Act of 1903, even without amendment, might abolish the system of dual ownership in the life of half a generation. What a transformation in the social economy of rural Ireland this change in land tenure means requires some imagination fully to appreciate. The benefits to the majority of the agricultural classes which will flow from the resulting social upheaval are, I fear, exaggerated, and the risks and responsibilities which belong to the new status are too little considered. The landlord and agent will, I anticipate, be found to have been not much worse than any other body of citizens, their alleged iniquities often being attributable rather to the system than to the use they made of it. The abolition of their social and economic leadership, even where it was abused, will leave a void which will have to be somehow filled. It is clearly a case where the Government will for some time have to fulfil the functions that a good landlord, in his own interest, under favouring conditions, would have discharged. As things are our peasant proprietary will be the least organised peasantry in the world.

67. One of my hopes for the future of Ireland is that, when the first efforts of the social upheaval pass, a large number of landlords will determine to remain in the country and take a part in building up its none too prosperous state. But it is of

great importance that encouragement be given to men who will bring capital, education and opportunities of travel to bear practically upon the problems of agricultural development. Even in countries where the State actively concerns itself with these matters, agricultural progress will be found to be largely due to the initiative and enterprise of men of this class.

68. I have not, however, so much in my mind the class of large proprietors as the class of large farmers whose leadership is required for the introduction of science into the practice, and of organisation into the business, of farming. I have already pointed out that as the work of agricultural development proceeds and begins to take effect in the country, one of the greatest difficulties to be overcome will be the lack of working capital required for buildings and equipment. The part played by the substantial farmer in this matter is a factor of vital importance in the establishment of a peasant proprietary—to say nothing of his function as an employer of labour, which has not been sufficiently considered. In my own conception of a permanent and prosperous peasant proprietary in Ireland, a few hyper-economic holdings are included for ex-landlords, and a good many for substantial tenant purchasers.

(3) Allotments for labourers.

69. I come now to the smaller holdings, the allotments for labourers. To begin with, there are the migratory labourers whose labour we would all desire to see adding to the wealth of Ireland. Large numbers of these workers will not, under the new conditions, be able to find employment in the neighbourhood of their present homes. Then there are the really congested districts, mostly lying along the seaboard, where subsistence upon agriculture is physically impossible. From many of these districts the people have never migrated, but have sought to eke out a bare existence by fishing, kelp burning, and other similar precarious resources. Such agriculture as they practice depends largely upon seaweed and sand, which they will badly miss when they go inland. Some of these people may be placed at once upon economic holdings, but the greater number will have a far better chance of improving their position if they are placed upon allotments,

70. For these labour must be provided. A constant demand for labour would, of course, exist in the hyper-economic holdings if the Department's scheme of agricultural development, involving the extension of tillage, were adopted and worked out. I may mention in passing that the change of system which we advocate, and which will increase the demand for labour, may come more quickly than is generally anticipated. We hold in the Department that the breakdown of our present wasteful grazing system will not come from Canada or the United States, where they are not likely much longer to have store cattle for export; but from the ranchmen of the Argentine. They will shortly take back from us an hundred-fold the high prices they have been giving for our best blood in order to improve the quality of stock, which they are growing in enormous quantities upon vast tracts of cheap land. We shall be forced into fattening rather than growing our cattle, and into a rapid development of dairying, pig-rearing, poultry and egg production, and similar operations where our nearness to market is an advantage to us. All this will mean capital, as I have already pointed out, and also a very considerable employment of labour. The strong farmer will want allotments established upon or adjoining his holding. The owners of economic holdings will be suppliers and employers of labour. They will be employers when the family in any generation is deficient in labour power and would, without such help, derive a smaller return from the land. The family, on the other hand, with a larger working power than the holding requires will be glad to find employment for its surplus labour. I hope this will complete the case for the three classes of holdings.*

The Fallacy of the Agrarian View.

71. The solution of the problem which I have ventured to criticise appears to me to be based on the fallacy that by giving a man a farm you make him a farmer. It would be less untrue to say if you make him a farmer he will get himself a farm. If the scheme could be put into operation at all, which is doubtful, it would inevitably go to pieces The cause of dissolution might

*I attach to this memorandum an extract from a letter written to me by the late O'Conor Don, which treats the question here discussed in a suggestive and interesting manner. (See page 47).

be a higher standard of comfort than that which was contemplated when the holdings were standardised. The more probable evolution of the policy would be a *de facto* subdivision—I am aware that it is to be *de jure* impossible—or an absorption of the holdings brought about by the insolvency of holders. I can conceive of no higher aim for statesmanship than the establishment in Ireland of a prosperous and contented peasantry. But in the pursuit of this ideal, in our desire to see our people increase and multiply and replenish the earth, we must beware that we are not building without foundations. We must not make Ireland a land where men accumulate and wealth decays—we must not reproduce the congestion we are seeking not only to cure but to prevent.

72. While avoiding this danger care must be taken not to discourage the ambition to become farmers, of those who are compelled to be chiefly labourers. The scheme I am advocating seeks to provide a means by which the successful members of the peasant classes may improve their opportunities We ought to have what (to borrow a term from the pedagogues) one may call an agricultural ladder, which will enable the allotment holder who has risen to the height of his opportunities to go up to the economic, and later, if he has it in him, to the hyper-economic holding. Conversely, in an ideal but not I think altogether unrealisable peasant proprietary, there should be a means by which those who, through change of circumstance, are unable to work a large holding to advantage, should be able to fall back upon a small holding, where the economic holder may find in an allotment a comfortable existence at home, instead of having to emigrate.*

*A very well-informed friend in the West of Ireland with whom I have corresponded on this subject writes:—"The chess-board solution—and it is the chess-board solution towards which we are driving—will be absolutely fatal to any life of real economic advance. The profession of farming must offer prizes to able and industrious men, otherwise it will cease to attract any but the stagnant of mind and body We want scope and opportunity for the vigorous. From a national point of view the ambitious and vital man is the man we want. And we won't get him to settle on a patch with no prospect of anything but a patch for the rest of his life. I know this from conversations with men of ambitious character among our young farmers. They say to me, 'We are not going to stop here when the land is all divided into 20-acre lots and a good man can get no more than another.'"

Elasticity and Mobility.

73. One general objection which is sure to be made to my scheme had better be faced at once. I am quite aware that it cannot be put into operation very rapidly, if the peasant proprietary is to be placed upon a sound and permanent footing. What I call the agrarian view, the inevitable consequence of the land system now being legislated away, still dominates the attitude of public opinion towards the problem of congestion It has had one effect upon the Irish peasantry which must be counteracted before they can be successfully started upon their new career. It has made them extraordinarily immobile. They stick to their holding with a tenacity which is frequently in inverse proportion to its inherent value. This sharply distinguishes them from many other agricultural communities I might name. When farming becomes a progressive business and not merely a bare existence, people will be content to move up and down the agricultural ladder.

74. If the reasoning which I have applied to the re-settlement of the land be approved, two conditions of material importance to the solution of the problem must be supplied. Firstly, instead of now stereotyping the form of peasant proprietary, the land system should have elasticity, which makes necessary a simple and cheap form of land transfer; and, secondly, the people should be induced and enabled to become mobile. The first condition is a corollary of the opinion above stated, that it would not be desirable, even if it were possible, at the present stage to determine the proportion which the three divisions of the land should bear to each other. Clearly the proportion should change with the changes in agricultural production and distribution brought about not only by scientific discovery, but by the foreign supply in the British markets.

75. The mobility required to enable our farmers to meet these changes can be produced only by education and organisation. There is, too, another reason for pressing forward with these two agencies of progress which I cannot here elaborate, but the importance of which will be plain to the Commission. If the view of those with whom I have chiefly worked in Ireland be correct, and the Irish people are especially strong in the associative qualities, the difficulties of migration will be

most easily surmounted by moving communities rather than families. I should like to see several such experiments tried, the Department being allowed in some instances to give special attention to the education and organisation of the communities before the migration takes place. It goes without saying that the closest co-operation between the authority dealing with the land and the authority preparing the people to prosper on the land is absolutely essential to the success of any policy which the Government may determine shall be tried.

76. Before concluding my observations upon the land aspects of the problem, there is a possible misunderstanding which it is well to anticipate. I hold that it is very desirable to arrive at an early decision as to the lands which are to be made available for the enlargement of holdings and the migration of families; but this is not incompatible with the view I have put forward, that the Government should proceed cautiously at first with the re-settlement of the land. Even if we could determine the types of holding to be created, and the proportion they should bear to each other, we could not now select the families to be settled upon them without prejudicing the claims of others who, though equally deserving, may not be ready to take advantage of the opportunities offered. My observation of the estates work of the Congested Districts Board has convinced me that until further experiments in re-settlement have been tried—and, still more, until further demonstrations of the agricultural possibilities of small holdings have been given—the people to be provided for will not know what kind of holding will be best suited to their circumstances. Among the consequences of premature settlement would be the granting of holdings to families who, not being prepared to cultivate them properly, will fall back upon grazing, which is less profitable upon a small than on a large scale. Others will refuse to purchase sufficient land to make the holdings economic; or if they are offered holdings elsewhere will refuse to move. The attitude of the people towards migration is improving, and in the near future it can easily be made much more favourable to schemes of re-settlement than it is at present. In short, we ought not to mortgage the future of the peasantry by forcing them to decide these vitally important issues before we have placed them in a better

position to act wisely in their own interests. These considerations will have to be reckoned with if the settlement of the land is to be satisfactorily carried out; and I have dwelt upon them in the hope that, so far as is humanly possible, from the succession of final settlements the Report of the Royal Commission may deliver us. Meanwhile, I see no insuperable difficulty in utilising land, which has been acquired but not redistributed, for the benefit of the community in whose behalf it is being held.

Industries and Fisheries.

77. A few words are needed to show that I have not ignored the subsidiary means of supporting the peasant proprietary. Some people think that the cheap labour supply of backward rural districts points to the establishment of industries of an urban character as the best remedy for congestion. The remarkable enterprise of the Foxford Woollen Mills, and the now well-known development of the carpet industry in Donegal are held to be a practical demonstration of the possibility of such manufactories. The Department's views upon this subject will be fully stated in a Memorandum to be put in by the Assistant Secretary for Technical Instruction, Mr. Fletcher. I shall, therefore, here confine my observations to the part which can be played in the general scheme by what are known as home and cottage industries.

78. It has been suggested that the aptitude the western peasantry display for home and cottage industries indicates the natural remedy for their condition. Unquestionably the Congested Districts Board have in many cases greatly improved the condition of these people by the establishment of classes for teaching lace-making, sprigging, and knitting; and I do not wish to underrate the importance of such domestic industries as a supplemental source of revenue. But in conditions which are themselves at root uneconomic, and where the industries cannot become permanent and self-supporting, I have great doubts as to the wisdom of regarding these industries as more than a temporary expedient. The great majority of those who conduct them regard them as a means of bettering their condition, not in Ireland, but in America, where, as far as I can learn, they seldom pursue the craft they have learned at home.

79. My view is that domestic industries, except as a means of temporary relief, should be fostered only where the economic state of the community itself is on a fairly satisfactory basis, and where the assistance of domestic industries is only necessary to afford a satisfactory standard of comfort. Mr. Fletcher will explain the Department's policy for the promotion of these industries where they can be permanently established as subsidiary to agriculture. Here it is enough to say that where by fostering such industries you help to perpetuate an uneconomic state and simply enable a class of the community to eke out a bare existence, you may aggravate the evil by preventing steps being taken which are likely to effect a cure. Something may, no doubt, be done for these people by the further development of fisheries; but this resource can apply only to a very limited area. From the great majority of the really congested districts the people must be removed; and the general scheme of resettlement which I have sketched has as one of its main objects the earliest provision of an economic existence for a portion of the peasantry who most urgently need aid, and who, at the same time, are by their circumstances the most difficult to help.

V.—Application of new Development Policy to Congested Area.

Outlines of the Department's Schemes.*

80. I must now revert to the adaptation of the Department's scheme to the special conditions of the congested area. Any such scheme must embrace the three cardinal principles—education, representation, and organisation. With regard to the last two no special difficulty arises, and the way is clear. The principle of representation which characterises the Department's administration would need a little time for negotiation between the central and the local representative bodies. It can then be

* For full explanation of the proposals for applying the Department's schemes to the Congested Districts and other backward localities, together with rough estimate of cost, see examination of Professor Campbell and Mr. Fletcher in Minutes of Evidence of Royal Commission on Congestion.

extended as rapidly as the people themselves determine. Effective organisation is only a question of adequate funds to employ competent organisers, and keep them at work, in each district where they are required, long enough to produce permanent results. The real difficulty will be to get full recognition given to education as the agency of progress to which we must look firstly and chiefly for progressive improvement in the condition of the people.

81. Our educational policy for backward districts involves three main lines of action :—(i.) the development of the staple industry of the country, agriculture ; (ii.) an all-round improvement in the conditions of home life ; and (iii.) the promotion of such subsidiary industries as are suitable to the conditions. What is required to attain these three things is not any change in the policy or procedure of the Department, but additional funds These are required for two reasons, firstly, that in a poor district a larger portion of the community have to be directly dealt with, and, secondly, that the system has to be applied more intensively and for a longer period.

82. In the case of (i.) agricultural development, the object will be attained in three chief ways. Firstly, we must increase the number of itinerant instructors so that more detailed attention can be given to each district. It is only quite recently that the Department have been in a position to make this extension in an efficient manner by the employment of trained Irishmen. We fully recognise the importance of these instructors being Irishmen, but it is more important that they should be trained in such a manner as to enable them to place our peasantry in a position to compete with their foreign rivals. Secondly, for the purposes of agricultural education, additional buildings will be required, and arrangements will have to be made for the utilisation of existing teaching organisations. Thirdly, farmers must be assisted to obtain buildings and equipment necessary for a more advanced system of agriculture. In addition to what the Government may consider it wise to do in the matter, the organisation of a system of mutual credit must be pressed forward. And as the educational methods take effect, the financial difficulty involved will gradually disappear,

83. As regards (ii.) an all-round improvement in the condition of home life, this is chiefly the work of domestic economy instruction. Its success is conditional upon the co-operation between the Department and the Commissioners of National Education, for which both sides are quite prepared, but which, pending the provision of the funds required, cannot be put into full operation. Assuming these funds to be provided, our main proposals are these: to extend our scheme of domestic economy for farmers' wives and daughters and manual teaching for adults, lengthening the courses, and making centres in which teaching is now temporary, permanent. The centres thus established will be available for the instruction of the upper standards of National schools, and a long-felt defect will be, at all events partially, remedied,

84. In the matter of (iii.) subsidiary industries, the Department hold that there is room for a limited extension of the home industries which have already rooted themselves in the country. At the same time every effort should be made to establish new lines of industry, especially in the production of articles for which there is a home demand. In this connection it should be carefully considered how far co-operation in the supply of raw material, and in the distribution of the product, can assist. But the limitations of the home industr must always be kept in view and care taken—with regard at least to women workers—that they are also trained to look properly after the interests and economies of the home.

VI.—Conclusion.

Importance to Ireland of the Royal Commission's Inquiry.

85. In the foregoing I have endeavoured to place the various factors of the problem of congestion, as I see it, in their true perspective. My survey of the conditions, the comparison I have drawn between the congested districts policy of 1891 and the later policy of 1899, which Parliament created a new Department to administer, and lastly, the examination of alternative schemes for the re-settlement of the land, are all intended to give prominence rather to the human than to the material aspects of the problem—to the man rather than to the land. In this view the differences of physical conditions and accidental circumstance

are less regarded than the human factors common to the peasantry of the whole country. The reference to the Royal Commission extends the scope of its inquiry to rural poverty wherever it may be found in Ireland, and this fact will probably decide the issue as between single and dual administration in whatever policy the Commission may recommend. But I have urged that the issue should be decided upon broader grounds than those of administrative convenience, and this for a reason which goes to the very root of the entire problem.

86. When a complete policy has been worked out, I am convinced that it will be necessary to give to the administrative authorities concerned with its execution a wide discretion and, within proper limitations, plenary powers. Such discretion and powers would not be granted, and could not be exercised, without strong popular support. I have argued that the little progress hitherto made towards the solution of our problem is largely due to the circumstances which gave rise to what I have called the agrarian view. I might add, as another explanation of the backwardness of thought upon this, as well as upon problems of rural life elsewhere, that the leading thinkers upon social economy have for many years devoted their attention almost exclusively to the more pressing questions raised in rapid succession by the growth of the modern city. In the coming report of the Royal Commission public opinion will, it is earnestly to be hoped, find the guidance which it needs for the understanding of the rural problem.

87. It may be said that in my attempt to make some smal contribution to thought upon the subject, I have raised more difficulties than I have solved. Unhappily, the problem is surrounded with difficulties, and the solution is all to find. I have gone over a wide field of speculation, but I do not believe I have discussed a single issue which the Royal Commission can afford to ignore, if they would make answer to the momentous question they are appointed to decide :—What changes in law or administration are needed for dealing with the problem of congestion *as a whole*.

Extract from Letter from the late O'Conor Don to Sir Horace Plunkett, dated 26th June, 1905.

"It seems to me that on this question of breaking-up the so-called 'grass ranches' and dividing them amongst smaller residential occupiers, two points have to be considered. First, the economic effect on the grass lands themselves, and, second, the results likely to arise in connection with the so-called uneconomic holdings which it is proposed to abolish. Now, with regard to the first, I am sure you will not dispute that if it be desirable to break up the grass lands and to people them with residential cultivating occupiers, it is not the poor ignorant tenants of the uneconomic holdings that, from an economic point of view, should be selected for the work. Emigration is to be lessened; it has been going on, and is going on, at too great a pace; every year the sons and daughters of well-to-do farmers, with a certain amount of capital, industry, and knowledge, emigrate, also a certain number of the unintelligent, poor, and ignorant peasants from the West, and surely if we are to stop emigration it should, from an economic point of view, be in favour of the former class rather than the latter, and therefore it is an economic mistake to redistribute the lands amongst the latter.

"But passing from this, and looking at the other side of the question. We have these poor people to deal with, we have the so-called uneconomic holdings to deal with, and the question is, is it economically wise to attempt to deal with them by transplanting a certain number of these people to the rich lands, and dividing what they leave behind amongst their neighbours. So far as the transplanted persons are concerned, I think they would be far better emigrated, and the lands given, as I have said, to the well-to-do young fellows who will have to emigrate in their place, but what will be the effect on the lands that are left? You say, in the pages you sent me, that there are some 200,000 holdings in Ireland not exceeding fifteen acres in extent, but you must remember that of these about 154,000 are holdings between five and fifteen acres, usually of very bad land held at almost nominal rents. The rent of these small holdings, in a vast number of cases, does not exceed one shilling a week, and in

very few cases does it exceed two shillings, and for this the tenant has, with very little labour, from half an acre to an acre of potatoes, a similar quantity of oats, and a bad sort of grass that feeds a cow, besides fuel, almost free of cost, and a house, which, whatever we may think of it, meets his requirements, and he has all this for less than is paid for a room in a tenement house.

"You may think me very paradoxical, but, in one sense, I say these holdings are the most economic in Ireland, that is to say, for the labour spent on them, and the rent paid for them, there is a bigger proportion of return than from the finest land in the country. A few weeks' labour in the spring, and the assistance of wife and children with labour that otherwise would be lost gives a return worth three times what it cost. Of course, the holding is not economic in the sense that if the occupier lived and worked solely on the holding he could not subsist on its produce; but he does not do so; he is usually a labourer, often a migratory labourer, and the holding is merely a valuable asset for occupying his spare time. Well, to this man, with his eight or ten acres, you propose to give his neighbour's holding of a similar character. The neighbour has been migrated. Do you think that the newly-created holding of twenty acres will be more economic than the old one? I say it will not; on the contrary, it will be less economic. The land is not of that nature that it could be cultivated, with profit, by hired labour at the present rate of wages, and it would not pay a man who is earning 15*s.* or 18*s.* a week in England to stay at home and till it.

"It is land which if not tilled will produce nothing, and your twenty-acre man will either have to give up his English earning or to let the land revert to its original barrenness. I am wrong in saying that these are the only alternatives. There is another alternative, and it is the one that will be almost universally adopted, the amalgamated holding will be divided. If not before, it will certainly be divided when the young family grow up, and it will be divided, because it is economically right that it should be divided, for it will yield a far greater economic return when in the hands of two or three parties than in the hands of one, because they can give to its cultivation the surplus labour

at idle times of the year. I therefore look on the migratory schemes, which are now in such favour, as economically wrong. I have no doubt that instead of diminishing congestion, in the long run they will increase it. The grass lands when contiguous to the small holdings, and when added to them, will, in course of time, become separate holdings, and no law that you can pass will prevent this. The only way in which it can ever cease will be by raising the social standards of the people, and by making the young people unwilling to settle down on wretched patches of land, and when that comes about, the very bad land, if not tilled by migratory labourers, must go out of cultivation altogether.

"My idea of meeting the wants of the small holders would run on different lines; instead of dividing the grass lands amongst them, at least in cases where the grass lands were contiguous to the congested area, I would make them be held on the co-operative principle, each man having a right to graze a certain number of beasts and a right to a certain quantity of meadow. You would then have no danger of new sub-division; you would improve every man's position without compelling him to give up the labourer's life to which he had hitherto been accustomed, and you would have the bad land used in the only way by which it would yield a profitable return."

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